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Source: *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Oct. - Dec., 1967, Vol. 28, No. 4 (Oct. - Dec., 1967), pp. 503-520

Published by: University of Pennsylvania Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2708526>

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HOBBS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EGOISM

BY BERNARD GERT

Hobbes has served for both philosophers and political scientists as the paradigm case of someone who held an egoistic view of human nature. In this article I shall attempt to show that the almost unanimous view that Hobbes held psychological egoism is mistaken, and further that Hobbes's political theory does not demand an egoistic psychology, but on the contrary is incompatible with psychological egoism.¹ I do not maintain that Hobbes was completely consistent; in fact, I shall show that there was a continuous development in Hobbes's works away from an egoistic psychology. But I do think that the main outlines of Hobbes's political theory, i.e., his account of the laws of nature, the right of nature, the obligations imposed by laws and covenants, and the rights and duties of citizen and sovereign, are essentially the same in *The Elements of Law*, *De Cive*, and *Leviathan*. I thus hold that even in his earliest work, *The Elements*, the only one where a charge of egoism is justifiable, the political theory does not depend on egoism. But the first and most important point to be established is that Hobbes did not hold an egoistic psychology.²

Before I undertake to show that Hobbes is not a psychological egoist, it may be worthwhile to show that Hobbes's psychology is almost completely independent of his mechanism. Hobbes's psychology consists primarily in attempts to define or analyze various psychological concepts, e.g., hope, fear, deliberation. According to Hobbes, introspection is the appropriate method for arriving at these analyses; "whosoever looketh into himself, and considereth what he doth, when he does *think, opine, reason, hope, fear*, etc. and upon what

¹ In an earlier article I showed that "psychological egoism cannot be validly deduced from any version of Hobbes's mechanical account of human behavior." "Hobbes, Mechanism, and Egoism," *Philosophical Quarterly*, XV (Oct. 1965), 341.

² The texts of Hobbes's works referred to here are those published in the *English Works of Thomas Hobbes* and *Opera Latina*, both edited by Sir William Molesworth, Bart., (London, 1840). However, for *Leviathan* and *De Cive*, (the English version) an additional reference is given. For *Leviathan*, it is the edition by Michael Oakeshott (Oxford, 1967): for *De Cive* it is the edition by Sterling P. Lamprecht, (New York, 1949). When referring to *Leviathan* and *De Cive* the first page reference is to Oakeshott and Lamprecht, the second page reference, in parenthesis, is to the Molesworth edition. This procedure was adopted because the latter two works are the only two in editions more generally available than the Molesworth edition. In the *English Works*, *De Corpore* is Vol. I; *De Cive*, Vol. II; *Leviathan*, Vol. III; *Human Nature* and *De Corpore Politico*, often referred to collectively as *Elements of Law: Natural and Politic*, are in Vol. IV. *De Homine* is in Vol. II of *Opera Latina*.

ground; he shall thereby read and know, what are the thoughts and passions of all other men upon like occasions.”³ Thus, in *Leviathan* he offers, supposedly on the basis of introspection, the following definitions: “. . . appetite, with the opinion of obtaining, is called HOPE. The same, without such opinion, DESPAIR. Aversion, with opinion of HURT from the object, FEAR.”⁴ But according to his mechanical account, appetite and aversion are not available to introspection, hence if his mechanical account were correct, we could never discover what it was like to hope or fear by introspection. Further, the mechanical account provides no account of opinions; hence on the mechanical account we could not distinguish between hope and despair. Though Hobbes does offer a mechanical account of appetite and aversion, he completely ignores this account when providing his analysis of more complex psychological phenomena. And though he thought one could build up a psychology from physics, he made no serious attempt to do so, and was perfectly aware that “. . . the cause of the motions of the mind are known, not only by ratiocination, but also by the experience of every man that takes pains to observe those motions within himself.”⁵

Hobbes has been accused of regarding men as machines,⁶ but it is interesting to note that he, himself, never compares men to machines. When he asks, “Why may we not say that *automata* (engines that move themselves by springs and wheels as doth a watch) have an artificial life?”⁷ and calls the heart a spring, the nerves strings, and joints wheels, he is not talking about an artificial man but only an artificial animal. According to Hobbes, when “*Art* goes yet further, imitating the rational and most excellent work of nature, *man*,” it is not a machine that art creates but “. . . that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMONWEALTH, or STATE.”⁸ In this respect Hobbes follows Plato, which is not surprising as at this time he considered Plato to be “the best philosopher of the Greeks.”⁹ But Hobbes also owed a great deal to Aristotle, and Leo Strauss has shown that Hobbes’s psychology owes more to Aristotle than it does to the new science of mechanics.¹⁰ Eighty years ago George Croom Robertson said of Hobbes that “the whole of his political doctrine . . . has little appearance of having been thought out from the fundamental principles of his philosophy . . . it doubtless had its main lines fixed when he was still a mere observer of men and manners, and not yet a mechanical philosopher.”¹¹ Thus, I do not claim any

³ *Leviathan*, p. 6 (p. XI).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34 (p. 43).

⁵ *De Corpore*, p. 73.

⁶ See Michael Oakeshott’s introduction to *Leviathan*, p. xxx, n. 1.

⁷ *Leviathan*, p. 5 (p. IX).

⁸ *Ibid.*, (*ibid.*).

⁹ *Leviathan*, p. 438 (p. 668).

¹⁰ *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes, Its Basis and Its Genesis*, translated by Elsa M. Sinclair (Chicago, 1952).

¹¹ *Hobbes* (Philadelphia, 1886), p. 57.

originality in observing that Hobbes's psychology is independent of his mechanism; what is original is my claim that Hobbes's psychology is not egoistic. The rest of this article will be devoted to supporting this claim.

Before I can show that Hobbes's psychology is not egoistic, I must provide some account of psychological egoism. This is not as easy as it seems, for psychological egoism, though often explicitly attacked, seems to be one of those views which no philosopher explicitly defends. Psychological egoism's philosophical interest rests upon its claim that men *never* act in order to benefit others, or because they believe a certain course of action to be morally right. To say only that most actions of most men are motivated by self-interest presents no philosophical problems, though it states a pessimistic view of human nature which may not be justified by the facts. It is the claim that *all* actions of *all* men are motivated entirely by self-interest that is philosophically interesting; it is only when the claim is presented in this all-inclusive manner that it is correct to talk of psychological egoism or of an egoistic view of human nature. I do not deny that Hobbes held a pessimistic view of human nature; I do deny that he held an egoistic view.

Although there is no difficulty in distinguishing an egoistic view of human nature from a pessimistic one, the problem of clarifying the egoistic view of human nature still remains. This is indicated by the fact that though commentators agree that Hobbes's account of human nature is egoistic they disagree significantly about the effect this has on his moral philosophy. A. E. Taylor, in his important article "The Ethical Doctrine of Hobbes," says "Hobbes's ethical doctrine proper, disengaged from an egoistic psychology with which it has no logically necessary connection, is a very strict deontology. . . ." ¹² It is clear Taylor does not think that having an egoistic psychology prevents Hobbes from presenting an ethical theory of a fairly orthodox sort. However, Howard Warrender, in *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, holds that Hobbes's egoistic psychology makes it necessary for him to have an ethical theory in which duty necessarily coincides with self-interest. ¹³ Finally, it has been maintained that Hobbes's egoistic account of human nature prevents him from having any ethical theory at all. ¹⁴ This sharp disagreement on the relation between Hobbes's egoism and his moral philosophy, though it reflects disagreement about the nature of morality also emphasizes the need for a careful investigation of egoism.

If we take psychological egoism to entail that an honest answer to

¹² *Philosophy*, XIII (October 1938), p. 408.

¹³ (London, 1957), see p. 277.

¹⁴ See Thomas Nagel, "Hobbes's Concept of Obligation," *Philosophical Review*, LXVIII (January 1959), p. 81.

the question "Why did you do that (voluntary) act?" always would be "I thought it was in my best interest," then psychological egoism is obviously false. We often act in ways which we know to be contrary to our best interest. Giving in to temptation is a common phenomenon, e.g., going to a movie when we know we ought to be studying, taking a second helping when we know we ought to watch our weight. Hobbes explicitly says that ". . . most men would rather lose their lives . . . than suffer slander . . ." ¹⁵ clearly indicating that he held that acting contrary to one's self-interest was a common occurrence. He is constantly lamenting that men's passions often lead them to act contrary to their best interests. ¹⁶ So that Hobbes certainly cannot be held to be a psychological egoist if this means that he holds that men always act from motives of self-interest.

If psychological egoism is to be at all plausible, it must include acting on individual passions, ambition, lust, etc., as well as acting out of self-interest. As striking as this enlargement seems, it does not materially affect the main point of psychological egoism. Though psychological egoism is phrased positively, i.e., holding that all men always act out of motives of self-interest, its point is most clearly expressed negatively, i.e., as denying the existence of certain kinds of motives. Awareness of this makes it clear why psychological egoism is relatively immune to certain criticisms Butler advances. ¹⁷ To point out that to act because of hunger, thirst, and ambition is not to act on a motive of self-interest, is only of academic value. I do not deny that failure to make this distinction may add further confusions to an already confused position, but making it does not free one from the temptation of psychological egoism. It would be an unusual psychological egoist who, having been informed of the distinction between hunger and the motive of self-interest, decided that psychological egoism was false. ¹⁸ What would convince the psychological egoist that he is wrong is the discovery of an action done from genuine benevolence, or because of the belief that it is morally right.

Recognizing the point of psychological egoism leads to the formulation which probably comes closest to saying what the psychological egoist wants to say: *Man always acts in order to satisfy his desires*. This formulation has the added advantage, to the psychological egoist, that it is importantly ambiguous. The ambiguity I am concerned with in this paper lies primarily in the phrase "his desires." ¹⁹ On one

¹⁵ *De Cive*, p. 49 (p. 38).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 55, 58 (pp. 45, 48): *Leviathan*, pp. 180, 194 (pp. 262, 284).

¹⁷ *Five Sermons* by Joseph Butler (New York, 1950), p. 24, note 5.

¹⁸ It is unusual to find psychological egoists at all. The only ones I have met are beginning students of philosophy.

¹⁹ The problems that arise when the egoist claims that one can unconsciously act in order to satisfy his desires was considered in my earlier paper, cited in note 1.

interpretation "his desires" are opposed to "the desires of someone else," and thus all benevolent actions are denied. On another interpretation "his desires" are opposed to "his moral sense," and all action done because one believed it was the morally right thing to do is denied. The psychological egoist must interpret "his desires" so that the formulation denies that any actions are done either because of the desires of others or because of one's moral sense. But the important ambiguity arises when "his desires" are not opposed to anything. On this interpretation we no longer have psychological egoism, but a view which I shall call "tautological egoism," i.e., a view which sounds like psychological egoism but which has no empirical consequences. I do not deny that Hobbes was a tautological egoist; I do deny that he was a psychological egoist.²⁰

Tautological egoism is a direct consequence of Hobbes's definitions of "voluntary act" and "will." ". . . a *voluntary act* is that, which proceedeth from the *will*, and no other."²¹ "*Will* therefore is the last appetite in deliberating."²² Thus for Hobbes it is simply a matter of definition that all voluntary acts are done in order to satisfy our desires. But as his definition of Benevolence in *Leviathan* shows, he does not deny that we can desire the good of another. Hobbes's tautological egoism is made more complex by his incorporating "good" into it. According to Hobbes ". . . whatsoever is the object of any man's appetite or desire, that it is which he for his part calleth *good*."²³ Thus when Hobbes says "of the voluntary acts of every man, the object is some good to himself,"²⁴ he does not intend to rule out either benevolent actions or actions done because of one's moral sense.²⁵ Even pleasure is incorporated into this logical scheme, "*pleasure, love, and appetite, which is also called desire, are divers names for diverse considerations of the same thing.*"²⁶ And on a single page Hobbes talks of pleasure as the appearance or sense of the motion he calls appetite and as "the appearance, or sense of good."²⁷ Thus even his statements about men seeking pleasure should not be taken as necessarily implying psychological egoism.

This complex structure is not as clear as one might wish. Not only have Hobbes's commentators been misled by it, but Hobbes himself, especially in his earliest work, seems to have been confused about the

²⁰ J. W. N. Watkins, in his book *Hobbes's System of Ideas* (London, 1965) seems to hold a similar view. However, he does not seem to realize how different this interpretation of Hobbes is from the traditional interpretation. See esp. chap. VI.

²¹ *Leviathan*, p. 38 (p. 48).

²² *Ibid.*, (p. 49). See also *Human Nature*, pp. 67f.

²³ *Leviathan*, p. 32 (p. 41). See also *Human Nature*, p. 32; *De Corpore Politico*, p. 159.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 86 (p. 120).

²⁵ However, see note 82 below and the related text. ²⁶ *Human Nature*, p. 32.

²⁷ *Leviathan*, p. 33 (p. 42). See also *Human Nature*, pp. 33–35.

import of his definitions. This confusion, together with his great pessimism concerning human nature, results in his making some statements which certainly seem to be expressions of psychological egoism. In defending Hobbes against the charge of psychological egoism, I shall show that he denies neither benevolent action nor action done from a moral sense. However, since I admit that Hobbes held a very pessimistic view of human nature, and that he held the view of tautological egoism, it should not be thought that I am claiming that the traditional view of Hobbes has been manufactured out of whole cloth. I admit that there are some statements in Hobbes, in which some form of psychological egoism seems to be espoused, but there are statements like these in most moral philosophers, even in Butler who is considered to have provided the classic refutation of egoism.²⁸ I do deny that such statements play any rôle in his political theory. Even in his earliest work, *The Elements of Law: Natural and Politic*, where Hobbes's pessimism was most extreme, and his tautological egoism did seem to become psychological egoism, his political theory does not depend on egoism.

This early work contains Hobbes's famous comparison of life to a race, where he says, "But this *race* we must suppose to have no other *goal*, nor other *garland*, but being foremost. . . ." ²⁹ *Human Nature*, the first section of this early work, was considered by many of Hobbes's contemporaries to be his finest account of the passions, and this view has continued throughout the years. Leslie Stephen, who says "Hobbes is the most thoroughgoing of egoists . . ." ³⁰ significantly remarks that the account of the passions ". . . is clearer in *Human Nature*, than in *Leviathan* . . ." ³¹ and all of his definitions of the passions are quoted from that earlier work.

The traditional view of Hobbes, if it did not originate with, received its greatest impetus from Bishop Butler. In Sermon I, when arguing that there is genuine Benevolence in man, Butler refers to Hobbes's remarks on benevolence contained in Chapter 9, paragraph 17 of *Human Nature*. He does not quote them, but says that Hobbes ". . . asserts the principle in the mind (good will, benevolence) to be only the love of power, and delight in the exercise of it." ³² Hobbes's actual remarks are, "There is yet another passion sometimes called *love*, but more properly *good will* or *charity*. There can be no greater argument to a man, of his own power, than to find himself able not only to accomplish his own desires, but also to assist other men in theirs: and this is that conception wherein consisteth *charity*. In

²⁸ See *Butler's Moral Philosophy* by Austin Duncan-Jones (Middlesex, 1952), 113-115.

²⁹ *Human Nature*, p. 53.

³⁰ Sir Leslie Stephen, *Hobbes* (New York, 1904), p. 131.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

³² *Five Sermons*, p. 21f., note 4.

which, first, is contained that *natural affection* of parents to their children . . . as *also*, that affection wherewith men seek to *assist* those that adhere unto them.”³³ One need not be a Hobbesian to defend Hobbes against Butler’s inaccurate account. But even if Butler’s account of the passage in *Human Nature* were accurate, *Human Nature* is an early work, which Hobbes did not even publish and had written years prior to *Leviathan*. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes offers this definition, “*Desire* of good to another, BENEVOLENCE, GOOD WILL, CHARITY. If to man generally, GOOD NATURE.”³⁴ Obviously Butler cannot quote this passage, for here it is impossible to interpret Hobbes as denying the existence of Benevolence, or distorting its sense.

But Benevolence is not the only passion defined differently in *Human Nature* and *Leviathan*, and the change is always in the same direction, away from egoism. Hobbes’s definition of Pity, a famous one, also changes strikingly from *Human Nature* to *Leviathan*. In *Human Nature*, “*Pity* is *imagination* or *fiction* of *future* calamity to *ourselves*, proceeding from the sense of *another* man’s calamity. But when it lighteth on such as we think have not deserved the same, the compassion is greater, because then there appeareth more probability that the same may happen to us. . . .”³⁵ Here, pity is really self-regarding; the misfortune of another is simply the cause or occasion of our worrying about ourselves. But, in *Leviathan* we have a complete switch. “Grief, for the calamity of another, is PITY; and ariseth from the imagination that the like calamity may befall himself; and therefore is called also COMPASSION, and in the phrase of this present time a FELLOW-FEELING: and therefore for calamity arriving from great wickedness, the best men have the least pity; and for the same calamity, those hate pity, that think themselves least obnoxious to the same.”³⁶ Now pity is what we ordinarily take it to be, concern over another’s misfortune. What was formerly considered the definition of pity, concern about future harm to ourselves, is now simply used to explain why we feel pity in some cases and not in others. In *Leviathan* Hobbes cannot be accused of trying to explain away pity, for his definition is perfectly correct. Hobbes’s explanation of *why* we feel pity for some people and not for others, that we only feel pity when we can identify ourselves with the injured party, may be incorrect, but it is quite plausible. To explain why we are sometimes concerned about others is obviously incompatible with denying that we are ever so concerned.

Perhaps the most drastically changed definition is that of Indignation. In *Human Nature* “*Indignation* is that *grief* which consisteth in the conception of *good success* happening to them whom they think

³³ *Human Nature*, p. 49.

³⁴ *Leviathan*, p. 34 (p. 43).

³⁶ *Leviathan*, p. 37 (p. 47).

³⁵ *Human Nature*, p. 44.

unworthy thereof. Seeing therefore men think all those unworthy whom they hate, they think them not only unworthy of the good fortune they have, but also their own virtues.”³⁷ In *Leviathan*, Indignation is “*Anger* for great hurt done to another, when we conceive the same to be done by injury.”³⁸ Not only is the definition in *Leviathan* a more accurate one, but taking into account that for Hobbes “injury” involves injustice³⁹ we see that this definition certainly suggests that Hobbes thought that men acted because of their moral sense. Thus a comparison of Hobbes’s account of the passions in *Human Nature* and *Leviathan* not only shows a pronounced shift away from egoism, but the later account seems clearly nonegoistic.

But it is not only in his account of the passions that Hobbes shows a decided shift away from egoism; a significant change also takes place in his account of the virtues. Stephen’s view that Hobbes quietly resolves “. . . all the virtues into forms of egoism,”⁴⁰ has some validity when applied to the account given in *De Corpore Politico*, but none whatsoever when applied to any of the later works. In this earliest work, he presents the following general account of virtue and vice: “. . . the habit of doing according to these and other laws of nature, that tend to our preservation, is that we call *virtue*; and the habit of doing the contrary, *vice*. As for example, justice is that habit by which we stand to covenants, injustice the contrary vice; equity that habit by which we allow equality of nature, arrogancy the contrary vice; gratitude the habit whereby we require the benefit and trust of others, ingratitude the contrary vice; temperance the habit by which we abstain from all things that tend to our destruction, intemperance the contrary vice; prudence, the same with virtue in general.”⁴¹ Here we see no hint of any distinction between the moral virtues justice, equity, and gratitude, and the personal virtues temperance and prudence. There is not even an opening here that will allow us to ask whether the two latter may be distinguished from the former, for Hobbes has said that “. . . prudence is the same with virtue in general.” Not only have we no distinction between the moral and other virtues, but it seems that he has really turned the moral virtues into prudential ones.

In *De Cive*, we already find a much different picture. There, significantly, we find Hobbes using the term “moral.” “The law therefore, in the means to peace, commands also good manners, or the practice of virtue: and therefore it is called *moral*.”⁴² Note that it is the virtues that lead to peace; equity, mercy, etc., that are moral virtues. Hobbes has not forgotten the other virtues. “The laws of nature therefore are the sum of *moral* philosophy, whereof I have

³⁷ *Human Nature*, p. 45.

³⁸ *Leviathan*, p. 34 (p. 43).

³⁹ See *Leviathan*, p. 86 (p. 119). ⁴⁰ P. 140. ⁴¹ P. 110. ⁴² *De Cive*, p. 58 (p. 48).

only delivered such precepts in this place, as appertain to the preservation of ourselves against those dangers which arise from discord. But there are other precepts of *rational* nature, from whence spring other virtues . . .”⁴³: temperance and fortitude. It is not an accident that Hobbes complained that it was because former philosophers “. . . could not observe the goodness of actions to consist in this, that it was in order to peace, and the evil in this, that it related to discord, they built a moral philosophy wholly estranged from the moral law, and unconstant to itself.”⁴⁴ Hobbes always uses the word “moral” with regard to those virtues that lead to peace, and neglects to use it with regard to those virtues that lead to individual preservation.

In *Leviathan* also, Hobbes ignores those virtues which are concerned with the preservation of individual men, remarking that they “. . . are not necessary to be mentioned, nor are pertinent enough to his place.”⁴⁵ He summarizes the laws of nature, or the moral virtues as follows, “Do not that to another, which thou wouldest not have done to thyself.”⁴⁶ The moral virtues now seem necessarily to involve our behavior to others, while it is obvious that prudence, temperance, and courage do not necessarily do so. One could be prudent, temperate, and courageous while alone on a desert island, but one could not be just or merciful. Nevertheless, Hobbes has not yet explicitly denied that prudence, temperance, and courage are moral virtues.

It is in *De Homine*, the only one of Hobbes’s philosophical works not yet translated into English, that we first encounter the explicit distinction between two types of virtue.⁴⁷ “That moral virtue, moreover, which we can measure by civil laws, which are diverse in diverse communities, is only justice and equity; that virtue, moreover, which we measure purely through natural laws, is only charity. And in these two is contained all of moral virtue. However, the other three virtues, besides justice, which people call the cardinal virtues, *courage*, *prudence*, and *temperance*, are not the virtues of citizens as citizens, but of citizens as men.”⁴⁸ Prudence, temperance, and courage are simply natural virtues and are no more moral than similar virtues in animals. They may, of course, gain moral worth if they

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 59 (p. 49).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 58 (pp. 48f).

⁴⁵ P. 103 (p. 114).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* (*Ibid.*); see also *De Cive*, p. 55 (p. 45), *De Corpore Politico*, p. 107.

⁴⁷ My colleagues and I are in the process of revising our translation of *De Homine* and hope to have it published shortly.

⁴⁸ P. 117. “Virtus autem moralis, quam quidem mensurare possumus legibus civilibus, quae diversis civitatibus diversae sunt, sola est justitia et aequitas; quam autem mensuramus per leges mere naturales, charitas sola est. Atque in his duabus continetur omnis virtus morum. Quod autem attinet ad virtutes alias tres praeter justitiam, quas vocant cardinales, *fortitudinem*, *prudentiam*, et *temperantiam*, non sunt illae civium virtutes, ut civium, sed ut hominum. . . .”

are used in the service of others, but they are in this respect not different from the intellectual virtues. In *De Homine*, Hobbes explicitly identifies the moral virtues as those that lead to peace and harmony. "But drawing together this whole doctrine about manners and inclinations into the fewest words, I say good inclinations are those that are suitable for entering upon civil society; and good manners, that is, moral virtues, are those whereby that society can be best preserved."⁴⁹ We now have a sharp distinction between the virtues that lead to peace, and those that lead to preservation directly, and only the former are moral virtues. But not only has the distinction been made between moral and non-moral virtues; the non-moral virtues have lost most of their significance. In *De Corpore Politico*, Hobbes had said that "Prudence is the same with virtue in general" and ended his chapter saying that ". . . equity, justice, and honor contain all virtues whatsoever."⁵⁰ In *De Homine* he ends the chapter with "Moreover, all virtues are contained in justice and charity. Whence it can be understood that inclinations contrary to these are evil; and contrary manners and all vices are contained in injustice and in a mind senseless to the misfortune of others, that is, in a lack of charity."⁵¹ The replacement of honor by charity as the companion of justice in containing all the virtues is the culmination of a trend that can be seen developing throughout Hobbes's writings, a movement away from egoism.

Hobbes's political theory is often thought to require an egoistic psychology, whereas what it actually requires is only that all men be concerned with their own self-interest. That is, though Hobbes's political theory requires that all men be concerned with their own self-interest, especially their own preservation, it does not require that they cannot be concerned with anything else. Nothing in Hobbes's political theory requires that men not have friends for whom they are willing to make some sacrifice. When talking of the right of punishing in which ". . . every man contracts not to assist him who is to be punished," Hobbes observes "But these kind[s] of contracts men observe well enough, for the most part, till either themselves or their near friends are to suffer."⁵² This is not psychological egoism. What Hobbes does deny is an undifferentiated natural benevolence. He says, "For if by nature one man should love another (that is) as man, there could no reason be returned why every man

⁴⁹ Pp. 117f. "Sed totam hanc doctrinam de moribus et ingeniis in paucissima verba contrahens, dico ingenia quidem bona esse ea, quae idonea sunt societati civili ineundae; et morea bonos, id est, virtutes morales, eos esse quibus inita optime conservari potest." 50 P. 111.

⁵¹ P. 118. "Contineri autem virtutes omnes in justitia et charitate. Unde intelligi etiam potest ingenia his contraria prava esse; et mores contrarios vitiaque omnia contineri in injustitia et animo ad aliena mala stupido, id est, in defectu charitatis."

⁵² *De Cive*, p. 73 (p. 75).

should not equally love every man, as being equally man,"⁵³ Hobbes's argument is that since it is obvious that all men do not love all other men equally, we do not love other men simply because they are men. He is not denying that we do naturally love some others, for even in *Human Nature* he talks of the natural affection of parents for their children.⁵⁴ His point is simply that love of others is limited and cannot be used as a foundation upon which to build a state.

When Hobbes offers as "a principle by experience known to all men, and denied by none, to wit, that the dispositions of men are naturally such, that except they be restrained through fear of some coercive power, every man will distrust and dread each other,"⁵⁵ he certainly seems to be holding an egoistic psychology. But when we look at how he supports this principle, we see that he is not maintaining that all men are naturally evil, but rather that in any *large group* you will find some evil men, and "though the wicked were fewer than the righteous, yet because we cannot distinguish them, there is a necessity of suspecting, heeding, anticipating, subjugating, self-defending, ever incident to the most honest and fairest conditioned."⁵⁶ Hobbes's political theory does not require that no one will obey the law without fear of punishment, but rather the much less controversial position that when dealing with *large groups* of people, there will always be some who will not obey the law unless they are threatened by punishment. This is clear from the following argument: ". . . if we could suppose a great multitude of men to consent in the observation of justice, and other laws of nature, without a common power to keep them all in awe; we might as well suppose all mankind to do the same; and then there neither would be, nor need to be any civil government, or commonwealth at all; because there would be peace without subjection."⁵⁷ This argument carries weight only if we take seriously Hobbes's talk of a great multitude of men. Though we may be aware of small communities in which mutual trust and respect make law enforcement unnecessary, this is never the case when we are dealing with a great multitude of men. Hobbes's point is that if a great multitude of men are to live together, there must be a common power set up to enforce the rules of the society. That there is not now, nor has there ever been, any great multitude of men living together without such a common power is sufficient to prove Hobbes's point.

Hobbes's main practical concern is to provide a theory that will persuade men to obey the law. Given this concern it is not surprising that he does not make use of benevolence, for limited benevolence, which is the only kind Hobbes thinks that there is, does not provide

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 22 (p. 3).

⁵⁴ See p. 49.

⁵⁵ *De Cive*, p. 11 (pp. XIVf).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12 (p. XVI).

⁵⁷ *Leviathan*, p. 110 (p. 155).

much support for obeying the law. But because Hobbes does not concern himself with benevolence, this is no reason for holding that he denies its existence. We have already quoted the definition of benevolence in *Leviathan*; it may not be out of place to quote two more definitions, which seem non-egoistic. “Love of persons for society, KINDNESS” and “Love of one singularly, with desire to be singularly beloved, THE PASSION OF LOVE.”⁵⁸ In *De Cive* Hobbes says “they who love their neighbors cannot but desire to obey the moral law, which consists . . . in the prohibition of pride, ingratitude, contumely, inhumanity, cruelty, injury, and the like offenses, whereby our neighbors are prejudiced.”⁵⁹ But Hobbes does not think that such love is widespread enough to play any rôle in his political theory. Since Hobbes’s political theory does not require the denial of limited benevolence, and since the quotations given above strongly indicate that he did not deny the existence of such benevolence, we may safely conclude that in so far as egoism denies the existence of any benevolent actions Hobbes is not an egoist.

Psychological egoism not only denies benevolent action, it also denies action done from a moral sense, i.e., action done because one believes it is the morally right thing to do. I shall label the view that denies this latter kind of motive, *psychological inclinationism*. Inclinationism is thus a milder form of egoism; it does not deny benevolent action, only action done because of a moral sense. That Hobbes is not an inclinationist is clear from his discussion of justice. “But when the words are applied to persons, to be just signifies as much as to be delighted in just dealing, to study how to do righteousness, or to endeavor in all things to do that which is just; and to be unjust is to neglect righteous dealing, or to think it is to be measured not according to my contract, but some present benefits.”⁶⁰ There are similar passages in both *Leviathan*, p. 97 (pp. 135f.) and *De Corpore Politico*, p. 97, but in *Leviathan* Hobbes admits that it takes a “certain nobleness or gallantness of courage, rarely found” to be a just man. However, Hobbes’s pessimism about the number of just men is not primarily due to his belief in rareness of courage but to his awareness of the strength of man’s passions and his conviction that most people had not been properly educated and disciplined.

One of Hobbes’s most important distinctions, that between natural man and civilized man, has been almost completely neglected.⁶¹ The importance of this distinction can be seen from Hobbes’s remark “To speak impartially, both sayings are very true; that *man to man is a kind of God*; and that *man to man is an arrant wolf*. The first is true,

⁵⁸ *Leviathan*, p. 34 (p. 44).

⁵⁹ *De Cive*, p. 196 (pp. 300f.). See also Molesworth, (p. 264). (Omitted from Lamprecht edition.)

⁶⁰ *De Cive*, p. 45 (p. 33).

⁶¹ But see Lamprecht, Introduction to *De Cive*, pp. XXIIff.

if we compare citizens among themselves; and the second, if we compare cities.”⁶² That natural men can be substituted for cities is clear from several passages.⁶³ Natural man is man in the state of nature, not the state of nature considered merely as the absence of a “common power to keep them all in awe”⁶⁴ but a more primitive state. It is perhaps best described in this passage: “Let us return again to the state of nature, and consider men as if but even now sprung out of the earth, and suddenly (like mushrooms) come to full maturity, without all kinds of engagement to each other.”⁶⁵ Natural man is man considered as if he were simply an animal,⁶⁶ not modified in any way by education or discipline. Though obviously an abstraction, natural man is fairly well exemplified by children. “Unless you give children all they ask for, they are peevish, and cry, aye and strike their parents sometimes, and all this they have from nature. . . .”⁶⁷ It is natural men that behave like arrant wolves; whether citizens, i.e., civilized men, will behave in this way depends on how they are brought up.

This point is made most explicitly when Hobbes explains why he denies the common opinion “that man is a creature born fit for society.”⁶⁸ This explanation, which is contained in a footnote to his denial, is very important. He does not deny that men actually live in society, nor does he say that society is a collection of misfits and that that is why we have all the trouble that we do; a position which would be congenial to the psychological egoist or inclinationist.⁶⁹ He does not deny “. . . that men (even nature compelling) desire to come together,” but he points out that “. . . civil societies are not mere meetings, but bonds, to the making whereof faith and compacts are necessary. . .” and children are not yet capable of entering into compacts. “Manifest therefore it is, that all men, because they are born in infancy, are born unapt for society.” Hobbes’s point is not simply that men are not born apt for society because they are born infants, and infants are incapable of meeting the requirement necessary for society. The point of the passage is that “Many also (perhaps most men) either through defect of mind, or want of education, remain unfit during the whole course of their lives; yet have they, infants as well as those of riper years, a human nature; wherefore man is made fit for society not by nature, but by education.” Hobbes’s point is that education makes man fit for society. Natural man may be unfit for society, but this does not mean that man is; man may become

⁶² *De Cive*, p. 1 (p. ii).

⁶³ *De Cive*, pp. 11, 29 (pp. XV, 11); *Leviathan*, p. 82 (p. 113); *De Corpore Politico*, pp. 94f.

⁶⁴ *Leviathan*, p. 82 (p. 113).

⁶⁵ *De Cive*, p. 100 (pp. 108f.); also *De Cive*, pp. 27f. (pp. 9f.).

⁶⁶ *De Homine*, p. 94.

⁶⁷ *De Cive*, p. 12 (p. XVI).

⁶⁸ *De Cive*, p. 21 (p. 2).

⁶⁹ *Leviathan*, p. 210 (p. 308).

civilized, he may by education change from one that acts only according to inclination to one that acts according to contracts and laws.

Thus Hobbes's equanimity about the character of natural man is explained. "Unless thereafter we will say that men are naturally evil, because they receive not their education and use of reason from nature, we must needs acknowledge that men may derive desire, fear, anger, and other passions from nature, and yet not impute the evil effects of those unto nature."⁷⁰ Children are free from guilt, but adults are not ". . . when nature ought to be better governed through good education and experience."⁷¹ And in *Leviathan* the unaptness of man for society is discussed again. "And to consider the contrariety of men's opinions, and manners, in general, it is, they say, impossible to entertain a constant civil amity with all those, with whom the business of the world constrains us to converse: which business consisteth almost in nothing else but a perpetual contention for honour, riches, and authority."⁷² What is Hobbes's answer to the claim that the nature of man is incompatible with civil amity? It is just what we would expect. "To which I answer, that these are indeed great difficulties, but not impossibilities: for by education, and discipline, they may be, and are sometimes reconciled."⁷³ And, Hobbes continues, "Nor is there any repugnancy between fearing the laws, and not fearing a public enemy; nor between abstaining from injury, and pardoning it in others. There is therefore no such inconsistency of human nature, with civil duties, as some think."⁷⁴ This is Hobbes's reply to those who hold that his psychology prevents him from having a moral theory.

Not only are neither psychological egoism nor inclinationism required by Hobbes's political theory; both are positively incompatible with it. I do not deny that in constructing his political theory Hobbes makes a powerful appeal to self-interest, and especially to self-preservation. But this is not his only appeal; he also appeals to morality. This appeal to morality consists primarily in stressing the obligation imposed by contracts or covenants. Since Hobbes maintains that ". . . the law holds the party obliged by virtue of the universal *contract* of yielding obedience,"⁷⁵ this is the emphasis we would expect from him, for we have noted that his primary practical task is to persuade people to obey the law. Hobbes's discussion of contracts and covenants leaves no doubt of his view that we ought to keep our promises, and not merely because it is to our benefit to do so. This is expressed as clearly as it can be in the footnote where Hobbes explains the distinction between the obligation imposed by

⁷⁰ *De Cive*, p. 13 (p. XVII).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, (*ibid.*).

⁷² P. 460 (p. 702).

⁷³ *Leviathan*, p. 460 (p. 702).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 461 (p. 702).

⁷⁵ *De Cive*, p. 157 (p. 185). See also *Leviathan*, pp. 172f., 343 (pp. 251, 518); *De Corpore Politico*, p. 221.

contracts and that imposed by the law. "More clearly therefore, I say thus, that a man is obliged by his contracts, that is, that he ought to perform for his promise sake".⁷⁶ Unless we wish to accuse Hobbes of urging men to do something which he thought they could not do, we must admit that he thought it possible for men to "perform for their promise sake."

To those who have regarded Hobbes as a complete egoist it was, of course, impossible to think of him appealing to men to do what is right. But without this prejudice one becomes aware that Hobbes thought that the opinion of the rightness or wrongness of an action had a great effect upon the actions of people. In the preface to the Reader, in *De Cive*, he laments the lack of a true moral philosophy and says that mistaken doctrines of what is right and wrong have been responsible for a great amount of bloodshed.⁷⁷ And one of the reasons he offers for the necessity of a coercive power is that men may be misled in their opinion of good and evil, right and wrong.⁷⁸ He even claims that it was in order to correct these mistakes that he wrote *De Cive* before writing the two books which should have come first.⁷⁹ Further he insists that the sovereign teach the people why it is their duty to obey him, i.e., that they have covenanted, in order to keep their obedience, and holds that such teaching is of more importance than the "... terror of legal punishment."⁸⁰ And in *De Corpore*, he criticizes all previous moral philosophy because "... that which is chiefly wanting in them, is a true and certain rule of our actions, by which we might know whether that we undertake be just or unjust. For it is to no purpose to be bidden in everything to do right, before there be a certain rule and measure of right established, which no man hitherto hath established."⁸¹ It is obvious that Hobbes does not think it is of no purpose to bid a man to do right, *after* there be a certain rule and measure of right established, which he thinks that he has done. Thus there is no reason to think that Hobbes would not use an argument simply appealing to people to do what is right and just. Indeed, it would be exceedingly odd for Hobbes, holding that mistaken views about rights and duties were one of the causes of civil war, to come up with a theory of human nature in which men never

⁷⁶ *De Cive*, p. 157n (p. 185n). See also the discussion of the obligation imposed by contracts, covenants etc., in *Leviathan*, p. 86 (p. 119), *De Cive*, p. 39 (p. 24), *De Corpore Politico*, p. 93.

⁷⁷ See pp. 8f. (pp. XI f.).

⁷⁸ See *Leviathan*, pp. 111, 211 (pp. 157, 310); see also *De Cive*, p. 66 (p. 67), and *De Corpore Politico*, p. 121.

⁷⁹ *De Cive*, p. 15 (pp. XIX f.).

⁸⁰ *Leviathan*, p. 220 (p. 323). However, Hobbes is not consistent on this point. For earlier in *Leviathan*, when arguing for a strong sovereign, he seems to place more reliance on the "terror of legal punishment." See e.g., pp. 138f. (pp. 198f.). Hobbes has the unfortunate tendency to exaggerate the importance of whatever motive for obeying the law he is considering at the time. But there is no doubt that he thought realization that one had covenanted did provide some motive for obeying the law.

⁸¹ P. 9. See also *De Cive*, p. 10 (pp. XIII f.).

act because of their beliefs in the moral rightness or wrongness of an action.

In addition to the factors already discussed, the fact that self-preservation or the rational avoidance of death plays such a central rôle in Hobbes's political theory accounts in part for the accepted view that Hobbes is a psychological egoist. For example, Hobbes holds that "No man is obliged by any contracts whatsoever not to resist him who shall offer to kill, wound, or any way hurt his body."⁸² Thus he maintains that self-defense is an inalienable right. Both the laws of nature and the right of nature are grounded in the rational seeking of self-preservation.⁸³ One commentator who says of *Leviathan*, "An egoistic theory of motivation permeates the entire book," maintains that Hobbes's egoistic arguments "come out with particular clarity in the exposition of the laws of nature."⁸⁴ Clearly this implies that arguments based on the primacy of self-preservation are egoistic arguments. But to say that man never acts against his own self-preservation is not the same as saying that he never acts against his own self-interest. In *Tom Jones*, Fielding makes the following remark about Partridge: "For Partridge, though he had many imperfections, wanted not fidelity; and though fear would not suffer him to be hanged for his master, yet the world, I believe, could not have bribed him to desert his cause." Hobbes's arguments concerning the law of nature would be persuasive to Partridge, yet it is quite clear that Partridge acts on motives other than his own self-interest. Hobbes's exposition of the laws of nature might be taken to show that he thought all men to be similar to Partridge, but this is far different from taking it to show that he held an egoistic psychology.

But Hobbes does not even hold that man never acts against his own self-preservation. As might be expected, the charge that Hobbes holds that man never knowingly acts in such a manner as would lead to his death is the result of failing to make the distinction between natural and civilized man. "For every man is desirous of what is good for him, and shuns what is evil, but chiefly the chiefest of natural evils, which is death; and this he doth, by a certain impulsion of nature, no less than that whereby a stone moves downward."⁸⁵ It is important to note the phrase "chiefest of natural evils," for it is only when we distinguish between natural evils, i.e., those things which are evil to natural man, and artificial evils that we can reconcile this statement of Hobbes with some others, ". . . most men would rather lose their lives (that I say not, their peace) than suffer slander. . .,"⁸⁶ and ". . . a son will rather die, than live infamous, and hated of all the world."⁸⁷ If we do not distinguish between natural and artificial

⁸² *De Cive*, p. 39 (p. 25). See also *Leviathan*, p. 91 (p. 127).

⁸³ See *De Corpore Politico*, pp. 83, 109; *De Cive*, pp. 27, 32 (pp. 8f., 16); *Leviathan*, pp. 84f. (pp. 116f.).

⁸⁴ Thomas Nagel, *loc. cit.*, 69.

⁸⁵ *De Cive*, p. 26 (p. 8). ⁸⁶ *De Cive*, pp. 49f. (p. 38). ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 79 (p. 83).

evils we have an unavoidable contradiction: men avoid death more than anything; most men would rather lose their lives than suffer slander, or rather die than live infamous and hated of all the world. It is, of course, no conclusive argument against an interpretation that it results in inconsistencies and contradictions, but when there is an interpretation which avoids such harsh results, it is certainly to be preferred. The desire for self-preservation is the strongest of all natural desires; it is not necessarily (according to Hobbes, it is not actually) the strongest of all desires.⁸⁸ Civilized men may have, indeed many do have, desires that are stronger than the natural desire for self-preservation.

There is an interesting, probably unintended, feature in Hobbes's comparison of man's avoidance of death with a stone's moving downward. Man naturally avoids death, and a stone naturally falls downwards. But a stone can move upwards, in fact many do, when they are thrown upward by man. That is, though stones naturally move downward they may artificially move upward. So man, who naturally avoids death, may by the intervention of man (other men) actually seek death, ". . . the greatest of all evils is death, especially under torture, for the griefs of life can be so great that unless their quick end can be foreseen, they may cause death to be numbered among the goods."⁸⁹ It is extremely easy to fall into the error of thinking that because a stone naturally moves downward, it never moves upward. This error is the inevitable result of failing to realize that man may cause things to act non-naturally. It is an error to conclude that since man naturally avoids death, he never knowingly acts in a way that will lead to his death. Not only can a civilized man act non-naturally, artificially; all actual men do act so in varying degrees. The distinction between natural man and civilized man enables us to read Hobbes without attributing to him a crude psychological theory whose only interest lies in the fact that it is so easily refuted.

If Hobbes is not an egoist, what is he? The answer has already been strongly indicated. Hobbes believed that human nature was malleable, that one could train, educate, and discipline people into good citizens. Granted this conditioning must take into account the strong passions of natural man, still through such training man could become quite different from what he was originally. Hobbes points out that children ". . . have no other rule of good and evil manners, but the correction they receive from their parents and masters . . . (and) children are constant to their rule. . . ."⁹⁰ And in *De Homine*

⁸⁸ It is however a rational desire, and acting contrary to it is considered by Hobbes to be irrational, as his account of the laws of nature makes clear.

⁸⁹ *De Homine*, p. 98. ". . . malorum omnium primum mors, praesertim cum cruciatu; nam tantae possunt esse vitae aegritudines, ut, nisi earum finis propinquus praevideatur, facient mortem inter bona numerari."

⁹⁰ *Leviathan*, p. 67 (p. 91).

he gives a detailed analysis of how character is formed. "Inclinations, that is, the propensities of man toward certain things, spring from an almost sixfold source; certainly from the constitution of the body, from experience, from custom, from good fortune, from the opinion one has of himself, and from authorities. When these things change then the inclinations also change." ⁹¹ From this list of character-forming forces, Hobbes gives special importance to the influence of man and society. This importance is shown in the passage where Hobbes is considering the force of authority. "From authority. Moreover, I call authorities anyone on any matter whose precepts or example one follows, because of one's estimation of their wisdom. From them, if they are good, good inclinations of youth are fashioned, and bad inclinations if they are bad; whether they are teachers or fathers or anyone else whom they, the youths, hear commonly praised for their wisdom; for youth honors those who have been praised, and regard them worthy of imitation. From this it is understood, first, not only, with how true and good precepts, fathers, teachers, and their guardians ought to imbue the minds of youths, but also how reverently and justly they should conduct themselves in their presence, as their inclinations are disposed, not less, but much more to bad habits by example, than to good habits by precepts." ⁹²

Here Hobbes shows a clear understanding of the way in which character is formed, noting the importance of good precepts, but aware of the greater importance of a good example. I grant that Hobbes was sometimes misled by his tautological egoism and that his pessimism *may* be greater than is justified. But it seems to me incredible that anyone with the understanding of human nature that Hobbes displays in this and numerous other passages, could be found guilty of the traditional charge of holding as crude a theory as psychological egoism. An unbiased look at the evidence, textual, philosophical, and historical shows beyond any reasonable doubt that the traditional charge has not only not been proven, but that the evidence in its favor is overwhelmingly outweighed by the evidence against it.

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⁹¹ *De Homine*, p. 111. "Ingenia, id est, hominum ad certas res propensiones, a sextuplici fere fonte oriuntur; nimirum, a temperie, ab experientia, a consuetudine, a bonis fortunae, ab opinione quam quisque habet de seipso, ab authoribus. Quibus mutatis mutantur etiam ingenia."

⁹² *De Homine*, p. 115. "Ab Authoribus. Authoris autem cuique cujusque rei eos voco, quorum quis praecepta aut exemplum sequitur, ductus opinione sapientiae ejus. Ab his, si boni, ingenia adolescentium formantur bona, prava si pravi; sive magistri ii sint, sive patres, sive alii quicunque, quos vulgo a sapientia laudari audiunt, nam laudatos reverentur et dignos existimant quos imitentur. Ex quo intelligitur, primo, non modo quam veris et bonis praeceptis adolescentium animos imbuere debeant patres, magistri, et tutores eorum, sed etiam quam sancte et juste in eorum praesentia sese gerant, ut quorum ingenia non minus sed multo magis ad mores malos exemplo, quam ad bonos praeceptis disponuntur."